

February 22, 2017

RE: Budget Hearing/Cuts

To whom it may concern on the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Melissa Serrano-Adorno and I am a parent of 4 sons. One of my sons is named Julian Adorno who is 20 years old and is about to age out of the school system once he turns 21 by the next school calendar year. My son has been diagnosed with autism since he was 18 months old. He receives special education services at school including a 1:1 behavior therapist, Speech therapy, BCBA, CBT/Community Based Training, participates in the Unified Sports and also home therapy services through Beacon Health Options; but all those services will come to a halt once my son ages out of school at 21.

So my concern is what will happen to my son's services if Governor Malloy's proposed additional budget cuts go through? There are NO funding for new graduates. How will I be able to work if my son Julian is home without a quality program such as DDS that he can attend and learn independent skills, social skills and even job readiness skills? Where will my son go? There's a waiting list that my son may never be in. With all the budget cuts that Malloy is proposing is not only affecting my son, but thousands and millions of the population affected with autism and intellectual disabilities not to mention those with multiple diagnoses including non-verbal. How can the state allow our children and autism community to regress after graduation? Maybe even allow Beacon Health Options to continue to provide services after the age of 21 if feasible, or at least until a better proposal or solution is created.

If you only knew my son Julian. He was non-verbal at birth for many, many years. He still needs speech. But he's come a very long way. He still has struggles that he is trying to overcome. He doesn't like change so routine and consistency is essential. If the services stop so does his therapy, so does his achievements, and his progress will decrease. If you are not affected with having a loved one on the autism spectrum you can't possibly fathom the feeling of despair that families like myself are facing with this devastating reality of these unrealistic budget cuts. I work in the school system and see firsthand what budget cuts do the special education program, staffing such as behavior therapists, and the lack of assistive technology devices. But also I volunteer in my community and autism organizations and advocate for other families besides my son because programs like DDS have not been given a pay increase and have more responsibilities but with less resources. The workers need proper specialized training constantly because the facts are no child or adult with autism are the same. So new techniques and skills need to be learned and properly implemented to teach their individual clients. I'm sure and hope you did your research before making this unexplainable budget cuts. Symptoms of autism, and their severity, vary considerably in each individual on the autism spectrum. Autism now affects 1 in 68 children and 1 in 42 boys just like my son Julian. By way of comparison, more children are diagnosed with autism each year than with juvenile diabetes, AIDS or cancer, combined.

- Autism prevalence figures are growing
- Autism is one of the fastest-growing developmental disorders in the U.S.
- Autism costs a family \$60,000 a year on average
- There is no medical detection or cure for autism

Programs like DDS and other day autism programs and group homes are needed in our community to assist our families that are so desperate and in great need. Let's face it there's no cure.

Could it be that you don't want to continue services for children and adults like mine because they don't have a voice to vote? Are you that cruel to take away their voice? Its parent's like myself that will voice out LOUD and continue to advocate for our children like my son Julian. I find myself very disappointed to say the least, in the decision making process that leads our Government to this conclusion without taking into consideration all those that matter most. Unless you find a cure the autism community is only going to grow and what will happen then?

I plead for my son Julian and for every voice that can't be heard that you reconsider and restore the \$25 million cut from Governor Malloy's proposed budget and ADD money for rate increases for the providers. The \$1 million added for wait list families is not enough for a fully funded and sustainable DDS system. I know it's a troublesome decision to make budget cuts, but this decision is a decision that will affect many people. Some decisions that are made in government may be strenuous, but this one should not be unaccommodating.

I may not be able to attend this budget hearing in person, but my mind, and thoughts will be there. I hope that my prayers will be answered for the better good of our future. Thank you for hearing my voice in this delicate matter.

Sincerely,

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